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in Extreme Conditions of War**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The article is devoted to the problem of students carrying out educational activities in the conditions of war. The results of an anonymous empirical study conducted by the author among students are described. The research was conducted after one month of war beginning and after one year of the war in Ukraine. At the first stage the purpose was to find out how students feel about the need to study in the conditions of war, what difficulties they face. The purpose of the second stage was to check how students' learning has changed over the past year (according to their own assessments), how much their cognitive activity has deepened and expanded, and what mental states accompany such changes. It is noted that student youth continued their education in extreme conditions. Moreover, a significant part of it was not just completing the minimum educational tasks for obtaining a diploma of education, but was conscientiously engaged in self-education. The article analyzes how self-education and self-development of an individual are related to changes in his education and indicators of mental states. The expediency of providing opportunities for self-education and self-development for student youth in extreme conditions to preserve their psychological well-being is substantiated.*

**Keywords:** *self-educational activity, student youth, extreme war conditions, psychological features of self-education*

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## **Introduction**

For more than a year, students of Ukrainian universities have been forced to adapt to life and study in the extreme conditions of war. They have to be flexible with regard to the mode and form of training due to the danger of enemy shelling, to the temporary unavailability of usual sources of information. Students are forced to be stress-resistant, capable of effective direct and indirect communication on issues of learning and mastering the profession.

It is very important that during the student age there should be a transition from educational to self-educational activities of the individual. This contributes to the formation of a competent specialist. The age characteristics of students and the possibilities of the modern information space are a good basis for self-education. However, the extreme conditions of the war create many difficulties for students' education and self-education.

We conducted an empirical study to find out how students perceive their educational activity in the war, what changes it has undergone, whether they engage in self-education (as additional to the main education) and how it affects them.

## **Literature Review**

War is one of the extreme conditions – an exceptional, special, extraordinary circumstance that threatens the life and health of people, influences stress factors, are perceived and evaluated as dangerous, difficult, hopeless situations – as a result of which anxiety and emotional tensions increase, and causes a traumatic effect on the human psyche (MIA, order №747 dated 31.08.2017).

In these extreme conditions of war, many situations arise that cause the appearance of specific emotional states like stress, anxiety, and frustrations.

A. Poltavska (Poltavska A., 2014) defends the opinion by stating that extreme situations are emotional because they actualize awareness of one's powerlessness, the risk to one's health, and uncertainty of the situation. They cause intense emotions and feelings disorganizeizes activities.

T. Tytarenko (Tytarenko T., 2017) notes that long-term military trauma can lead to various consequences: a significant decrease in the level of psychological health of an individual, loss of a sense of subjective well-being, increased resilience, the emergence of new life perspectives, and activation of one's life creation.

The threat of risk to the psychological well-being of an individual living in war is beyond doubt. Therefore, it is important to find ways and means of preserving and maintaining the psychological well-being of an individual.

Activity is important for processing and overcoming stress.

In our previous study (Martyniuk I. A., Papathanasiou I. V., Fradelos E. C., 2021) it was proved that students' psychological well-being is closely related to engagement in self-educational activities. In particular, it was found out that self-educational activities of students are evidence about several

indicators of psychological health, such as: internal motivation to learn, good orientation in time (i.e. the ability to live in the present without postponing their lives "for later"). In addition, self-educational activities in the context of the specialty that students acquire, indicates a good autonomy of the individual (i.e., its integrity, completeness, vitality, maturity). And self-educational activities that are not related to the specialty that students acquire also show their higher need for knowledge and creativity (as a creative attitude to life).

### **Methodology/Materials and Methods**

The research was conducted in two stages. The first is a month after the beginning of the full-scale invasion of the occupation forces on the territory of Ukraine. At the first stage, 75 students were interviewed using a Google questionnaire. The second is on the anniversary of the start of the war. At this stage, 115 students were interviewed using Google questionnaires. The research subjects were students of the 1st-5th courses of the "Psychology" specialty of the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine.

The purpose of the first stage was to find out how students generally feel about the need to study in the conditions of war, what difficulties they face. The following closed and open questions were asked. Among them: Are you able to attend online classes? Do you support the decision of the university management to continue the educational process under martial law? What difficulties did you have to face during the last school week? What positive aspects of the organization of studies at the university under martial law can you point out? Do you have any wishes regarding the organization of training during the war? The location of the students was also ascertained.

The purpose of the second stage was to check how students' learning has changed over the past year (according to their own assessments), how much their cognitive activity has deepened and expanded, and what mental states accompany such changes. The following methods were used for this: questionnaire, A. Wessman and D. Rix's "Self-Assessment of Emotional States" method, The scale of low mood (subdepression) from the questionnaire of V. Zung, The anhedonia scale of Stait-Hamilton.

Descriptive statistics and Fisher's angular transformation method were used to process the results.

### **Results**

#### *Results of the First Stage of the Study*

During the first stage of the research, it was found that our subjects were in different regions of Ukraine (Kyiv, Vinnytsia, Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zhytomyr, Zakarpattia, Zaporizhzhya, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kirovohrad, Kryvorizka,

Lviv, Mykolaiv, Poltava, Rivne, Ternopil, Kherson, Khmelnytskyi, Cherkasy, Chernihiv) and various European countries (Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Germany, Poland, France). Therefore, they differed in the extent of the impact on them of the extreme conditions of the war.

Depending on the level of tension in the territory of residence, related to military actions in Ukraine, 60% of students were able to fully or partially attend online classes at the university. At the same time, 40% of students were unable to attend classes due to power outages at their location, difficulties with Internet connection, or difficulties in combining volunteer work and studies.

Despite the difficulties in setting up the workplace, difficulties in dividing attention between the content of studies and external danger signals, physical or psychological exhaustion (due to constant lack of sleep and stress), many students (33.3%) confidently supported the need to continue studying in war conditions. They noted its positive aspects:

- gives an opportunity to distract from anxious thoughts and start doing something, not to fall into depression;
- makes it possible to avoid degradation;
- communication with teachers and fellow students in pairs is a means of psychological support;
- makes it possible not to lose time;
- gives an opportunity to feel one's involvement in the future reconstruction of our country.

The rest of the students (66.7%) expressed doubts that they would be able to study effectively in the conditions of martial law.

#### *Results of the Second Stage of the Study*

Having conducted the second stage of research among students of the same specialty almost a year later, we found out, first of all, how their education changed during the year of extreme war conditions. The analysis of respondents' answers showed: 61% of them managed to maintain their educational activity at the same level as it was before; 26% noted a decrease in its effectiveness and 13% answered that the quality of their training even improved.

Our respondents also indicated the main types of activities they were engaged in during the last year. It turned out that 10% of them were engaged in self-education in addition to education. At the same time, half of them noted the preservation of the quality of education at the university at the same level as it was before, the other half noted an increase in its effectiveness.

In order to find out whether self-education affects the quality of students' learning, we conditionally divided all subjects into two groups: those who engaged in self-education and those who did not. The percentages of respondents with different changes in learning quality were compared between these groups using Fisher's angular transformation method.

Its application proved that students who engage in self-education significantly more often ( $p \leq 0.001$ ,  $\phi_{emp} = 3.29$ ) note an improvement in the quality of their studies than those who do not engage in it. In addition, we note that among the students engaged in self-education, there were none who noted a decrease in the quality of their studies.

It is obvious that the implementation of educational or self-educational activities by students in the conditions of war is closely related to the mental states experienced by them. Therefore, we conducted a study of the mental states of our respondents and analyzed their differences between two groups: 1) students who engaged in self-education, 2) students who did not engage in self-education.

Here are the results we got.

**Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Indicators of Mental States**

№	Group	Distribution of respondents according to indicators of self-assessment of emotional states, %									Distribution of respondents according to low mood/sudepression, %			Distribution of respondents by indicators of anhedonia, %		
		Calmness - anxiety			Energy - fatigue			Elevation - depression			The mood is normal	Low mood	Depressive state	Anhedonia is absent	Low level of anhedonia	Near to medium and high
		Calm prevails	Balance	Anxiety dominates	Energy dominates	Balance	Fatigue dominates	Sublimity dominates	Balance	Depression dominates						
1	Students, who did not engage in self-education	25	41	34	7,5	59,5	33	14,5	68	17,5	72	22	6	78	10	12
2	Students, who were busy by self-education	25	58	17	17	66	17	25	75	0	92	0	8	83	0	17

As we can see from Table 1, among the students engaged in self-education there are no persons with depression, low mood, low level of anhedonia. A comparison of the percentages of respondents of both groups according to other indicators showed that these groups differ significantly only according to the indicator "normal mood" ( $p \leq 0.032$ ,  $\phi_{emp} = 1.859$ ).

## **Discussion**

We obtained results on a sample of subjects from one university, without differentiating the level of stress experienced by students. At the same time, the obtained results are consistent with the results of research by other authors.

In particular, in the study of the emotional stability of students in the conditions of war by O. Jejera (O. Jejera, 2022), the following data were obtained about the following:

- in the conditions of war, the success rate of educational activities can be either low (13.9%), average (37.9%) or above average (31.3%);
- the motivation to study among existing students (65.3%) decreases, but some students (0.3%) have an increase in motivation;
- the majority of students assess their mental state as "mostly satisfactory" (54.4%) and "mostly unsatisfactory" (18.7%), a small percentage of students consider their mental state to be unsatisfactory (7.2%) and almost a fifth students consider their mental state to be satisfactory (19.7%);
- the consequence of experiencing war events is passive (reluctance to do something, inability to concentrate, desire to distance oneself from traumatic events) or active behavioral reactions (the desire to act for a noble goal).

Also, the results of our study of students' mental states are consistent with the results of research by the Institute of Social and Political Psychology (ISPP, 2022), conducted half a year after the start of the full-scale war in Ukraine. It was determined that representatives of all demographic groups and regions of the country rated their psychological well-being quite highly (6.7 points out of 9 possible). At the same time, respondents' self-esteem indicators were higher and their ability to self-regulate and master their emotions was significantly lower.

Our research does not cover all important aspects of the stated topic. Further study of the nature of self-education activities in the extreme conditions of war and its impact on indicators of psychological well-being of an individual is needed.

## **Conclusions**

The obtained empirical data provide grounds for such conclusions.

In the extreme conditions of war, the self-educational activity of student youth acquires the following important features:

- connection with improving the quality of basic education at the university,
- connection with maintenance of normal mood and absence of depression.

It is likely that the self-educational activity of students can serve as an indicator of the preserved psychological well-being of an individual, as well as a means of its restoration or preservation.

Therefore, in our opinion, providing even the smallest opportunities for students for self-development and self-education in the conditions of martial law is very important.

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